



NEWS RELEASE



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UNITED STATES, CANADA SIGN AMENDMENTS TO MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and Canadian Minister of the Environment Sheila Copps today formally signed treaty amendments to improve the management of birds that migrate between the two countries and to provide fairness in the regulation of waterfowl harvests to Alaska's indigenous people and Canada's Aboriginal peoples. The amendments to the Migratory Bird Convention, North America's oldest international wildlife conservation pact, improve the original version signed in 1916.

In barring migratory bird hunting between March 10 and September 1, the original treaty did not adequately take into account traditional harvests of migratory birds by northern people during the spring and summer months. These harvests have gone on for centuries and continue to this day, despite the treaty prohibitions. In many cases, the birds are a vital food source for northern people.

Upon ratification by Canada and the United States, the amendments will bring the 1916 Convention into conformity with Aboriginal and treaty rights and Canada's obligations under the Canadian Constitution.

Babbitt noted that the negotiations on the amendments included senior representatives of key indigenous Alaskan groups, as well as Alaska Fish and Game Department officials. "I am proud of our work with Alaska natives and with state and private citizens to correct an historic inequity," Babbitt said.

"The treaty has been inequitable in allowing hunting in northern areas only at a time when birds had migrated south and there were few remaining to harvest," he said. "The amendments not only remove this basic injustice but also open the way for better migratory bird management by including people who control some of the best migratory bird habitat in the world."

"The Migratory Birds Convention with the United States has greatly benefitted the people of both countries and served as a model for many other international agreements to conserve wildlife and habitat," said Copps. "These amendments demonstrate the vitality of our uniquely close relationship with the United States and they will continue to ensure abundant migratory bird populations by bringing Aboriginal and indigenous peoples into continental management."

Because no new harvests are being established, biologists expect the amendments to have little or no impact on either the number of birds flying south or the abundance of game species.

Under the amendments, exchanges and data collection among the United States, Canada, and Aboriginal and indigenous people will be increased, expanding the scientific base for migratory bird management.

While the amendments provide for a legal spring and summer harvest for some far northern people, the Canadian and American governments are required to ensure this migratory bird harvest is conducted in accordance with conservation principles. The United States will establish specific harvest regulations for spring and summer seasons in conjunction with local and state cooperative management organizations.

The protocol, which contains the amendments, must be ratified by the President of the United States with the formal advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. The signing ceremony took place in the State Department's Treaty Room.